

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
OF JON WOODS  
BY KEVLIN HAIRE  
FEBRUARY 14, 2013

Q. Good morning, this is Kevlin Haire at The Ohio State University Archives. It's February 14, 2013, and I'm conducting an oral hearing interview with Dr. Jon Woods. Dr. Woods, thank you for being here.

A. Great to be here.

Q. And we'll go ahead and start with the interview. What I wanted to know first was a little bit about your personal history, your family, where you grew up, and how you got into music.

A. Well, I was born January 22, 1939 in Miners Hospital in Spangler, Pennsylvania. Spangler is a small coal mining town, with approximately 4,500 people. Right across the tracks is Barnesboro, another small mining town. Barnesboro was Spangler's rival in music as well as sports. Both towns shared a long history of excellence in their band and choral programs. Eventually both schools joined together to form Northern Cambria Schools. I attended Spangler as a student and then was hired at Northern Cambria to be the head choral and band director. So I learned a lot from the experience of being part of both communities.

Q. Was your family musical?

A. My mother had three brothers and a sister. Two of my uncles played the trumpet and the other played the trombone. My aunt played violin and my mother sang. My dad was a self-taught set drummer. So I would say that we were a musical family.

Q. Okay. So did you decide in high school that you wanted to pursue music or how did that come about?

A. Yes, I was a sophomore in high school (1953) when I decided I wanted to become a music teacher. It was an interesting thing that influenced my decision. At that time, the big dance band was very popular. Near Spangler and Barnesboro, was another small town (Carroltown), where there was a dance hall. When spring came around, the dance hall hosted a major Big Band once every two weeks. I got to go to those dances and I would stand beside the bandstand all night long listening to those great bands. Some of the name bands included the Glen Miller Band, Tommy Dorsey, Stan Kenton, Les Brown and Benny Goodman. Later in my career I got to play with the Tommy Dorsey Big Band under the direction of Warren Covington.

Q. That's amazing.

A. I was a trombone player and so were Glen Miller and Tommy Dorsey. It was great to hear those dance bands. So I think early on I sort of had that experience in the back of my mind as something I might like to do.

Q. Where did you go to college?

A. Well, I went to school at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (1956-1960), which was about 20 miles from my home. That's where I got my Bachelor's degree. I graduated with a double major in music education and trombone performance. I played in the marching band in the fall and the concert band every term. In the winter term, I played in the symphony orchestra. I also played occasionally with the jazz band. One of the reasons I went to IUP was that I had heard their jazz band. They had jazz band as part of their instrumental program.

Q. Oh okay.

A. Another interesting thing was that at IUP they required all instrumental majors to take voice lessons. I had sung in the choir while I was in high school. So when they discovered I was a tenor, I was kept busy singing in the large symphonic choir and in the men's glee club. I ended up doing my senior recital in voice and then a week later I played a trombone solo for our class graduation.

Q. That must have been quite an honor.

B. Yes, it was. IUP has always had a great music school and last year they honored me as one of their outstanding graduates. Once a year IUP recognizes graduates who have had successful careers. So I got to go back there. The school has doubled in size and it is still a great place to go for music education.

C. Well congratulations. That is quite an honor really, to go back there for that.

A. It was a great event. My wife and I went and spent three days there and met a lot of older friends.

Anyway, in my senior year at IUP, the music job opened up at Northern Cambria.

Q. Now Northern Cambria, was that a high school?

A. Yes, Barnesboro and Spangler had combined into one school and the new combined school was called Northern Cambria Schools. So even while I was still in college, the principal named me the head band/choral director.

Q. Okay.

A. I spent my senior year in college at Northern Cambria two - three days a week working to run the band and choir and the other two - three days a week I went to IUP for my classes. It was quite an experience. I loved music and loved the bands and the people, so I had a great time doing it.

- Q. Now what year was that that you started that or that you graduated, I guess?
- A. I graduated in 1960, I started teaching at Northern Cambria in the fall of 1959.
- Q. How long were you at Northern Cambria?
- A. I was at Northern Cambria for about six years (1959-1965). One of my important goals was to go to graduate school. I came across a notice that they had a graduate assistantship available at Penn State. Going to graduate school was what I really wanted and needed at the time because I had decided that I needed to get some college teaching experience.
- Q. Okay.
- A. So I applied for the assistantship at Penn State. I got a call from their Director of Bands, Dr. Dunlop. He had a great reputation in Pennsylvania. He asked if I was still interested in Penn State. When I said yes, he said, "Then you're hired." The assistantship was for a year and two summers (1965-1966).
- Q. And that was to get a Music Education Master's?
- A. It was a Master of Arts degree. It was a great experience because as I got my degree I had an opportunity to work with the Penn State Blue Band. That's what they call their marching band. I got to write a show, and teach that show to them. And I became great friends with Jim Dunlop, the Penn State Band Director. As I was finishing up my degree, I asked his opinion about schools that had job openings. He always said, "No, you don't want to go there." Finally he said "Jon, I will give you a call when the right job comes along." So I said, "Okay." I planned to go back to Northern Cambria to teach. A new school, not far from Northern Cambria, was opening. The new school was called Cambria Heights. My principal from Northern Cambria had been hired as the superintendent of the

Cambria Heights School District. So he called me and said, “Will you change jobs?” I liked that principal so much that I said I would do that. He was a great administrator. I had his two daughters in the band. He was a music lover. So I taught at Cambria Heights, the year after I finished my Masters. I lived at home, because I was close enough to Indiana to drive. Toward the end of that school year, out the blue, the phone rang and it was Jim Dunlop from Penn State and he said, “I just came back from the place where you should apply for a job, Newark School District in Delaware.” I didn’t know Newark, Delaware from Oshkosh, Wisconsin. But because he said, “This is the place to go,” I decided to do that. So I resigned from Cambria Heights, broken hearted about leaving the principal and the assistant principal. We were good friends and they offered to make me an elementary principal.

Q. Just to keep you there.

A. Yes! I got the job at Newark, Delaware and it was the opposite of Northern Cambria and Cambria Heights Schools in terms of the size. Newark was a school of 2,000 students. It was three blocks from the University of Delaware, very much like Upper Arlington is here. I developed a great band program there and I got to do some more trombone playing. I played with the Wilmington Jazz Arts Group. On occasion, the Tommy Dorsey Band would come through. When the Tommy Dorsey Band came through, they would bring maybe three or four original Dorsey band members and then the Wilmington Jazz Arts Group would join with them to form the big band. It went out under the heading of the Tommy Dorsey Band. I played with them two or three times and that was my dream.

Q. Oh my gosh, I can’t even imagine it.

A. I was also playing with the Wilmington Symphony. It was a very good orchestra because Wilmington is only about 45 minutes from downtown Philadelphia.

Q. Big talent pool.

A. Exactly. We had a big talent pool and we had members of the Philadelphia Orchestra who came to play in the Wilmington Symphony. So that was a great experience. The brass section of the Wilmington Symphony was basically all professors at the University of Delaware and they were mostly alumni of the University of Michigan. Every time I would go to rehearsal, I would hear them talk about Michigan. And what I heard was good.

Q. And you heard good things as opposed to what you might hear here?

A. Yes! By now I'm thinking about college teaching. So I applied to the U of M and got accepted in their Ph.D. Music Education program with minor cognates in Trombone Performance and Music History.

Q. Oh wow, and what year was that? When did you go to the University of Michigan?

A. I started doing my classwork in the summer of 1968. I did summers only until 1972. I started my residency year the summer of 1972.

Q. Okay. I just wanted to get a timeframe for people listening to this.

A. So I was accepted at the U of M and one of the interesting things about that is when I was there I was not in the marching band or connected with it. But I went to all the games. So my first glimpse of The Ohio State Marching Band was at the OSU vs Michigan football game. I remember watching both pre-game shows. U of M came out first and they were okay, and then Ohio State came on. While OSU Marching Band was on the field, I leaned over to the person I was with and

said, “Now there’s a band!” I didn’t know that at some point of time in the future, in fact, the very next year, I’d be working with the OSU marching band. So I go to U of M and did my residency year which concluded at the end of summer 1973. It’s August and I’m looking for a college teaching job. When I was at U of M, I met up with a guy named Mark Kline, who was an OSU grad. Mark was working on his Masters at Michigan. And we became great friends. We were both trombone players and had recitals together in the summer. He said, “I just heard from a friend that there’s a job opening at OSU.” Every summer there was an annual conducting clinic workshop [at OSU] and every summer, people from over the country attended. Mark’s friend had attended conducting workshop. So this guy came up from Ohio State and told Mark that there was a job open at Ohio State. So you have to know Mark to appreciate his character, he’s a lot of fun. We went out one night and he said he would call Paul Droste about the job.

Q. Who was then the OSU Marching Band Director?

A. Yes, Paul Droste was the director. So when I dropped Mark off at his house and as he goes up the steps, I lean out the car window and I said, “Hey Mark, are you going to make that phone call?” He said, “Oh yes, come on in and I’ll make the call.” So I go in and he calls Paul. Paul took the call and was polite, but not really encouraging. But he gave Mark the information of how to apply and who to apply to. So after that phone call, I sent my credentials to OSU. I called the Penn State Band Director and he called Paul to recommend me. He was a big supporter of my work. And Mark was an outstanding OSU grad. So the next thing you know, I got an interview and was hired by OSU in 1974.

Q. All right, 1974.

I can remember pulling in front of OSU stadium on my first day. It's summer time and school hadn't started yet, but the planning stages were in full force. I got out of the car and my knees shook a little bit. I said, "Wow, it doesn't get any bigger than this." "I've really done it to myself this time." But needless to say, it's been one of the best things that have ever happened to me. I love Ohio State and I love the band. In my 38 years here, I've had so many great experiences. Paul Droste was a great mentor. He is one of the top band directors that we've had here and we hit it off very well from the start.

Q. I assume he was the one who interviewed you.

A. Yes, Paul interviewed me for the marching band part of the job. And then, Dr. Wayne Ramsey, who was the Chairman of Music Education, interviewed me for music education. So I had a double appointment. I was actually hired as a music education faculty member and the Associate Director of the marching band. So it's been 38 years, 10 years as the associate director and 28 years as the director.

Q. Let me back up. A lot of Assistant Directors at OSU then go on to become Marching Directors at other universities. It's a great stepping stone. But you stayed here. How did that come about that you became Director at OSU?

A. Well, it was an interesting thing. By being the Associate Director I accumulated ten years of experience under Paul. So I was ready for the position of Director. I give Paul credit for taking me under his wing and making sure I understood every aspect of the program. He included me in on everything from budgeting to planning and we had many conversations about the marching band program and where we were going. So when Paul decided to retire, he was pleased with the



work that I had done. Also, the Ohio State marching band really has had a history of moving the Assistant Director to the Director position.

Q. Well, he had been an Assistant Director.

A. Right, in fact, looking at the history of the band's directors, that's pretty much been what's happened. The Assistant Director moved up when the Director retired. That's what has made this position a very stable one. Also, my philosophy, which was to add to, not subtract from, fit what they wanted. Because a lot of things are great about the band, like it's marching style. I didn't touch any of those things.

Q. Did you feel like you even could?

A. I had experience at Penn State and then at Ohio State. In college bands, it's best to move slowly if you are making changes and not do something abruptly. I'd plant a seed here and there. I'd talk a potential idea for change over with a lot of different people, give them my reasons for considering the change and listen to their concerns. For example, one of the things that happened is that instruments are continually being refined at the factory. At the time, we had in our band an older horn called an alto horn. And along came a substitute for an alto horn. The new horn was called a mellophone. And the big difference was, that the sound of the alto horn went straight up because the bell of the horn pointed up. So the sound would go up to C Deck, but below C Deck, you couldn't hear the alto horns and the part they played.

Q. Oh, okay, interesting.

A. So I decided to make the change to mellophones. It's the first of the instrument changes I made. I talked to the alto horn section and said, "You know our

audition numbers are going down because students in high school don't know the alto horn. They are playing the mellophone in high school, but we don't have it here. Also, the bell of the mellophone goes straight forward, so if we had mellophones, the sound would be enhanced and improved, which would be better for the entire marching band. And our students bought into that idea because it was all true. Many of them had played mellophones in high school before coming here and switching to alto horn. They could understand it, but it's still a change. So I planted that seed and let it settle for about two years. We talk about it occasionally, but I waited until they were ready to move on it. When the alto horn section got together and told me they wanted to do it, I said "This is it, we've got to go ask the alumni," because the alumni club is going to pay for these horns. The students wrote up a petition asking the alumni for the horns and everyone in both rows signed it. I remember going to the alumni meeting and there was a group of alumni sitting around the table. I put the petition on the table and started talking about changing to mellophones. All of a sudden, the alumni got quiet. One by one, they had stopped talking. And then one alumnus said, "Did you coerce these students to do this?" And I said, "No, this is a petition the students came up with." "Mellophones are what's going on in the band world today." "The students understand this." "Mellophones will make a big difference in the sound of the band. We can give the mellophones more melodies to play and they'll be heard. Mellophones will improve the middle voice of the band." The alumni agreed to buy mellophones so that we could switch.

Another instrumental change I made was adding bass trombones. That was a little bit of a challenge because the bass trombone is a bigger instrument, so

people worried that it would be hard to carry the bass trombone through the crossovers in the Script Ohio.

Q. That would be tough.

A. In order to make the switch, a way to do the Script had to be worked out. So I sent a group of our marching band squad leaders down to the practice field and said, "This is the problem we have." "You people figure out how we can get through a crossover with a bass trombone so that it looks like everybody else." And they did! They came up with movements that worked very well. Not many people realized the change. Adding bass trombones was a good thing. The sound of the bass trombones added a new sound dimension to our band. Since it's a bass instrument, it reinforces the bass line. And it brings the bottom of the band out a little bit more. It turned out to be a very good change.

Q. Was there any reaction to that? Any negative reaction to that change, as you said with the mellophone?

A. Not really.

Q. Okay, but it was slow?

A. Yes. Next we gradually started to make some changes in the sound of our percussion section. And that all worked out too. It took a while. We've had some excellent percussion instructors. Again, you don't jump in and turn everything around all at once. You talk to the students and the alumni. You add a small change here and another change there. If it's good, then it's going to last and if it's not good, then get rid of it. You don't really know until you make the change and have the students use it for a season or two. We educate our students

- on how the change is good for the whole band. We listen to our recordings and the sound of the band. Those changes have been significant and very good.
- Q. Good. Well, let's go back to when you were first hired. Now you had the ten years of being Associate Director, but I'm guessing that your first game as Director would still be very, a very big event for you.
- A. I can remember that first game vividly. I was on the west side of the field, which is the home side, and the band is getting ready to come down the ramp. I looked over and here comes the percussion section out the ramp. So I had my eyes on them and I went for my ladder. Guess what? There was no ladder. So the band is coming down the ramp and onto the field and I'm looking around for something to stand on. Fortunately, the football team had a table on the 50-yard line. I immediately jumped up on that and directed the pre-game show from the table.
- Q. Did the band notice? I know they saw you on the table but they didn't know that there was trouble?
- A. They didn't know. The band machine was rolling! That made my heart jump.
- Q. There also was a problem. I was reading Script Ohio, an older version, which said that, I think, this was before your first game, the maintenance crew had moved the flagpole. And nobody would think that moving the flagpole would be a big difference for the marching band, but it was. Can you talk about that a little bit?
- A. Yes, I was at my music education office in Hughes Hall and a couple of the band students came running in and said "You know, they're moving the flag pole from the south end to the north end!" Now this is a major change.
- Q. And why is that?

- A. I mean, it's just that the band has always entered the field through the north ramp, marched down the field and stopped facing south and the flagpole. Now, all of a sudden, guess what? The flagpole is not going to be there. It's now in the way of how we enter the field in the Ramp Entrance.
- Q. Because they're supposed to face the flagpole when they do the Star Spangled Banner, right?
- A. Right. It was a moment of terror for a while.
- B. So how did you resolve that?
- A. The solution was an easy fix, really. When the band entered the field through the North Ramp, we made an adjustment to where they turned when they hit field to start forming the block. Next, the band performed Buckeye Battle Cry and went across the field as before. At the south end of the field, after the end of Buckeye Battle Cry, we added an 8 second silent drill. The band would stop together, instruments down together, flank north as a group, and place. Now the band is facing the flagpole, but they're standing in the south. This turned out to be very positive because now the band can be heard throughout the whole stadium.
- Q. Oh good.
- A. And that was a great solution to the problem because it was minimal change for the band.
- Q. And was that one of your big first problems?
- A. That was the first big problem. I mean, we solved it, it's amazing. The answer popped in my mind as I was driving from Hughes Hall to the stadium. So by the time I got there I had figured out what we could do to solve the problem. It just worked out nicely.

- Q. So now it's just ingrained?
- A. Ingrained. They're going to march down the field playing towards the south end of the stadium, then into the pre-game show, then place and play the Star Spangled Banner facing north.
- Q. Do you think your years as Associate Director here helped you with problems like that? I mean, it would probably have been a much different experience if you had just shown up new to the job.
- A. Right. Experience is everything and being careful about how you make a change, even if it's going to be a good one as far as you can tell. It's amazing, our fans love and follow the band so closely that they notice any little change, I would imagine a lot of people said, "Look, he's on a table." I love the Ohio State fans because they love the band and they watch everything we do.
- Q. Oh yes, I'm sure.
- A. We get mail and calls from people after every game.
- Q. Do you really? Wow!
- A. Most of it is very good. They're moved by the band and we have great Buckeye fans. I can't tell you how many people have told me, that as soon as the band comes down that tunnel in the Ramp Entrance, they get a tear in their eye. It reaches out and touches people. They definitely love the band. And so they have been a great audience to play for. The Buckeye Nation is a major force and loves the band and the band loves them. The chemistry is phenomenal.
- Q. Do you feel kind of like a rock star?
- A. Sort of.
- Q. Do people recognize you on the street out of your uniform?

A. Oh yes.

Q. They do? Okay.

A. Yes, every place I go, out for dinner, whatever, somebody will come over and say, “Hey, you’re the marching band Director.” And that’s great. This shows a great love for the band and the University. We’ve had a long history of great arrangers, great conductors, and a long history of success. Our leadership transitions have basically been the associate director moving to the Director position. Charlie Spohn was the associate director under Jack, then Paul was the [associate director] under Charlie. I was Paul’s assistant [associate director] and Jon Waters was my assistant [associate director]. And we’ve been able to constantly continue to improve. In fact, people have asked me, “What do you think is the greatest tradition? Is it the “Script Ohio?” Is it “Hang on Sloopy” or the Ramp Entrance? And I say, “Well, those are all very important traditions, but, I believe, the greatest tradition is the Tradition of Excellence. That’s our philosophy in everything we do. Our students want to do everything right. They want every note right. They want to march well.” Our alumni expect the band to continue to improve. So to me that’s the greatest tradition. Over the years we have had strong Directors. And each of them has added something to the band in terms of the marching and music. And so I give all the Directors credit for their contribution to our history of excellence. That is our tradition, our most important tradition. We focus on how well we are marching and playing, and I think we do a great job with that philosophy.

Q. Now you’ve talked about every Director adding something. One thing that you added was the computerization to be used in show writing and design work.

A. Right.

Q. Did you think it was time to do that or did you fight against it?

A. No, it was definitely time to do that. It was obviously very new and we were one, if not the only one, of the first major college bands to start using it. And it made a huge difference and improvement in the show writing.

Q. How so?

A. Let's take a circle. You're going to do a show that has a circle drill in it with three circles. Before the computer, we just used a pencil, paper, and compass to draw the circles and then we'd put a dot on the paper for each band person. Now let me tell you, when you're doing a show with circles in it, to get that spacing right between people, to be uniform in spacing with three circles, it's really hard and time consuming. You can have interval problems galore because you just can't humanly do it by hand. On a computer, you type in the circle and in one second it's there and it's perfect. So the computer is a tool that gives you the opportunity to try different things and create a drill with precise spacing of people. And because it is so easy to create a chart, it's just a natural thing to create a chart for every 8 or 16 counts so that every band member has charts that gives them their place assignments. When I took over, a show we were doing back then had 20-25 charts. Now, with the computer, some of our shows have 50, a little over 50. So our students have more reference points. It helps them to more quickly learn the show and to be more precise in their placements. If something doesn't work as well as you expected, you can immediately fix it up. We used to always have to worry about the deadline. Before the computer, it often took 40-80 hours to create the charts after you had the idea. You had to



draw every dot (that's 192 on each page) with equal size and spacing. Then you have to hand number each dot. And because of the possibility of human error, you had to check each chart to be certain you had the right number of dots and only one of each number. Nothing was worse than teaching a drill for the first time and having a student hold up his/her hand because he/she didn't have a number in a chart. With the computer you can chart faster, it looks neater, and it's easier to read. It keeps track of the number of people and identification of each person. If the first chart is right, the next ones will automatically have the right information. Now students can say, "We're minus 32 counts over here on our charts." The directors can tell them we'll have it square tomorrow. Bang, go home, and in ten minutes work it out. It just was one of the best things that could have happened in terms of show design and charting. And we were one of the first major college bands to use that technology.

Q. Now you had been to bowl games before as Associate Director, but do you remember your first bowl game as Director? Was that a Rose Bowl that you went to? I'm trying to think.

A. My first bowl game as director was the 1985 Rose Bowl.

Q. Oh, okay.

A. That was a tremendous experience. My favorite, well I should be careful, one of my favorites of all bowl games is the Rose Bowl.

Q. I think it's near and dear to every Buckeye's heart.

A. Well, in terms of the band, what I was told about the Rose Parade, was that originally, years ago, when they started the Rose Parade and they started entertainment, they had chariot races and it's evolved into one of the most

interesting and unusual parades in the country today. And so it's an experience to go to see the floats, the pageantry, to riding around in the buses and the instrument van to get to rehearsal fields. You see people sitting along the curb with a tent days before January 1st.

Q. Just waiting.

A. Just waiting, and they say the waiting starts about a week before. And so the parade puts an extra light and emphasis on the bands.

Q. Yes, that's true.

A. So in terms of bowl games, you can't touch the Rose Bowl.

Q. That's true. Did you get nervous, though, you were in charge of a lot of young people out on the road. Are they pretty disciplined?

A. Yes, we run a tight ship. Every now and then somebody can make a mistake and that's going to happen and we have ways to deal with that. But the students have really been good in bowl games and trips. They want to march.

Q. Right, well, they work so hard to get in the band, I'm assuming that they don't want to be kicked off.

A. That's right.

Q. Did it get tiring after a while though, the bowl games. I remember Paul Droste told me in his interview, when he retired, it was wonderful to have a Christmas finally.

A. I enjoy bowl games. I've been to 35 bowl games in 38 years.

Q. That's true.

A. I just love bands in general. I've been connected with bands for a long time. I also love concert band and jazz bands but there's something special for me about

a marching band, a good one. And I'll survive without going to a bowl game, I guess.

Q. You get caught up in it, I suppose?

A. Yes, Rose Bowls especially!

Q. It's probably worth the travel because of everything you get out of it.

A. That's right. It's a special reward for our students to end a challenging football season. And it's sort of competitive in a sense. I mean, you're with another school, another band, and for our students it's a reward. I've been to just about every bowl game you could name at least twice. And I feel that way about all of them.

Q. Something you just said made me think, obviously we have the rivalry with Michigan but does the marching band have certain rivalries with other bands? Or are you just so much better?

A. I would say yes, with bands in the Big Ten especially. They have been outstanding and there are some really great bands in the Big Ten. In fact, the whole conference is strong and there's a lot of enthusiasm and excitement with college marching bands these days, but we're one of the best. Watch out for Ohio State! We take other bands very seriously. And there are certain schools, Michigan, Michigan State, Illinois, and Penn State have fine bands. Indiana and Purdue and Northwestern do too. The Big Ten conference, has always been known to have a long tradition of great bands. But when these bands are coming to town, I don't have to do much more than say, "Oh by the way, Purdue is going to be here this week." And we will turn it up a notch or two in practices that week.

- Q. Do you watch other bands' performances and try to get ideas from them? Does that happen a lot?
- A. We always watch them and see what they're doing.
- Q. Can you think of an example?
- A. In terms of some of the favorite bands, the ones that I just mentioned are ones that are good to watch. Michigan State is very good, and Indiana is very good. Michigan and Penn State are good too. I'm probably missing a couple, but there are great bands in our conference. It motivates our people, and in our band, we'll always turn it up a notch when there will be a visiting band. It's human nature. So as far as I'm concerned, it would be great to have a visiting band at every game.
- Q. That's true. You don't always have a band, depending upon the school or at least a band comparable to yours.
- A. I want to go back to talk about the Buckeye Nation and Skull Session. We invite the visiting bands to come to our Skull Session at St. John's Arena. Nobody has a pre-game warm up like we do. Some bands stand out in front of their band room and play before the game. Michigan does that. They stand on the tiered steps of their band center and play for their football fans. But that can't compare to our Skull Session. Our band marches down the ramp onto the floor of St. Johns. Then the O.S.U. team comes in and our fan's excitement and enthusiasm goes through the roof. It gets you mentally ready for the football game. It's great to be down on the floor for Skull Session. You hear how well our band plays and how intense they are about the game. Fans leave Skull Session excited about the game.

- Q. Well I'm sure the people who go to the skull sessions help get you excited as well. I've been to one Skull Session and it just amazed me how everybody is in their seats before you arrive just as if they were at the game. It was amazing to me. So I can see how that energy would sort of feed off each other in a way.
- A. The cheering and participation by the fans in Ohio Stadium has really evolved over the years. In fact, game atmosphere has become a big thing in intercollegiate sports and football in particular. There are huge cheering sections of students and they have banners, flags, and paint their faces. The athletic department has been really working to create an exciting atmosphere on game day. The band is part of this. It didn't happen overnight, but there's a lot more excitement and activity now.
- Q. Right, I can see that. Let's talk also about your time as a music professor, because you weren't just the band director. What were your other duties and activities?
- A. That's another thing I love about my job at Ohio State. I have been dedicated from day one to supporting teacher education and to helping future teachers have the experiences they need to be successful in a public school setting. I am a full Professor in the School of Music. I teach two courses that are required by our music education major students. One course is Secondary Instrumental Methods. It's a class required for seniors who are majoring in instrumental music education with a goal to be a middle school/high school band or orchestra director. I teach a second course for those students who are interested in marching band. That course is Music 666, Marching Band Techniques. I teach the students how to write pre-game and halftime shows. The third course that I take very seriously is student

teaching supervision. And I've had a ton of people involved in that course. In fact, I remember when Gordon Gee announced my retirement at the first home game of the 2011 season. He turned around to the skull session crowd and said, "The news today is Dr. Woods is retiring." There was kind of an "Ohhhh." And Gordon asked me say something. I said, "How many of you people in here have I had in a class at some point in time?" And almost the whole place stood up. Of course, the Marching Alumni Band of about 600 was there. I've had a lot of them over my 38 years. So it's been exciting to take student teaching very seriously and work hard at helping the students learn exactly what they need to be successful.

Q. You've written at least one book, right, on the subject?

A. Funny you would mention that. I have a couple things.

Q. Okay, this book is entitled, "The Marching Band Program: Principles and Practices," by Dr. Bentley Shellahammer ...

A. He was the marching band director at Florida State University and studied here at Ohio State.

Q. Okay, and James Swearingen ...

A. Jim was the Grove City High School band director at one point in time. He's on faculty at Capital University. He's on our marching band arranging staff. He's also one of the nation's top composers and arrangers of music for public school bands.

Q. And Dr. Jon Woods, of course. And when was that published?

A. This was published in 1986.

Q. Is it sort of the Bible?

A. Yes, it's evolved into that. I use it in the music course that I told you I teach, Marching Band Techniques. And it is pretty much of the standard book in courses around the country. This is not a show writing book. There are stacks of those. This book focuses on the philosophy, administration, and the dos and don'ts of running a band program, a good marching band program.

Q. How did you all decide to do that book?

A. That's an interesting story. The reputation of the OSU band brought Bentley Shellehammer to Ohio State. Our football team was playing Florida State in Ohio Stadium in 1982. Bentley brought the Florida State band to the game. It was a long trip from Tallahassee, but he had heard about our band and wanted his band to see our band. You see, there are some shared traditions between Florida State and Ohio State. Manley Whitcomb was the marching band director of OSUMB (1939-1942 and 1946-1951). In 1952, he left OSU and became the marching band director and professor at Florida State [in 1953]. The Florida State Band knew that. So Bentley Shellehammer brought the Florida State band up here to see and hear us and he was so impressed that he went back and asked his department chair for a year off so he could do his PhD at Ohio State. He had a fellowship to study here, but he spent a lot of time around our band and staff.

Q. Oh.

A. So he came up here and we became good friends. Jim Swearingen was on the arranging staff so they got to know each other through the band. So we are all friends and we said, "Why don't we sit down Monday nights and work on a marching band techniques book?" And we did it in an unusual manner. We had a hand held tape recorder and we would sit down and talk about a subject, like you

and I are talking now. We'd talk about the subject of each chapter and what should be included in it and what would be helpful. So every Monday night we would get together for a couple of hours and at the end of each meeting, one of us would take the cassette tape, transcribe it, and bring it back to the next meeting. and we'd talk about it the next time. So it was a joint venture of the three of us. We decided that there were a lot of drill books out there that showed how to write a drill. We decided what we really had to share was how to organize, plan, and run a top band program. So that's what this book is about and it's been very popular ever since.

Q. It's been in use since 1986?

A. Yes.

Q. Wow, and it's still going strong.

A. About another publication, this was a research publication. I was involved in a book series called, "Introducing the Instruments" by Dr. James Froseth. He was my dissertation advisor. I worked on the book for the baritone/euphonium. This book series is very popular in the country.

The marching band has the tradition of making a recording ever two years. I've been a Director for 28 years, so I have 14 recordings.

Q. That's a lot of recordings, yes.

A. Do you have these by chance?

Q. We probably do. I can look in our database and see.

A. I'll give those to you.

Q. Thank you. Thank you very much. We get a lot of questions about the marching band, as you can imagine. Thank you, we'll look for these. So you're not only



serving as the Marching Band Director and as a music education professor teaching students, but you're also publishing, whether it's in print form or music form.

A. Right.

Q. Did you ever sleep?

A. I have gotten a lot of sleep lately.

Q. As your time as Director went on, I'm assuming it became easier in a way. You know what I mean?

A. Yes. One of the other parts of the tradition of excellence is the expectation that the next year's band will be the best band yet. So each year we do have the mindset that we are going to continue to get better, continue to be aware of what's going on around us, and to be the very best we can be and have the best Ohio State University Marching Band that we've had yet. Our students are committed to this excellence and that is, I think, the lifeblood of our band. What is so special about them is that they really take it seriously. We take our music and marching seriously and we build on that every year. In fact, at one point in time I remember inviting Paul Droste in to talk to our squad leaders. And he said to them as he's finishing talking, "You know, this band is better than my band." And it sort of shocked me cause I am a great supporter of Paul. But I understood why he said that. We don't stand up and talk about another college band. What we talk about is The Ohio State University Marching Band, and what we need to do to be the best band yet in the history of Ohio State. So that is the chemistry that is alive and well here and is responsible for all of the things that we see here with the band. The band is getting better each year.

Q. Speaking of Paul Droste, the reason I guess the reason I asked you if you ever sleep, part of the reason was, when he was here a little bit ago, he often does research here for the new Script Ohio book, as you know, and he mentioned that your typical game day starts much earlier than his did. So can you tell me about a typical game day?

A. I can. Let me think for a minute.

Q. Sure.

A. This is a typical schedule for the noon games.

Q. Okay, right.

A. I love the afternoon games. These early morning games are killers.

Q. Okay.

A. So for a noon kickoff this is what I do. I'm up at 4:30 a.m., and out the door by 5:15 a.m. At 6:00 a.m. the band warms up and we take attendance.

Q. At 6:00 a.m.?

A. 6:00 a.m.

Q. Okay.

A. Then at 6:00 a.m. we have a music rehearsal. We play through the pregame and halftime music of the day and then we take some time to watch the videotape of Friday's practice. Our music rehearsal goes from 6:00 a.m. sharp to 6:45 a.m. Then we go to the practice field and have inspection. We have an inspection every Saturday morning on uniforms and instruments.

Q. And this is on the field?

A. Yes. It's on our practice field.

Q. Okay.

- A. We get to the field at 7:00 a.m. and then we take about 15 minutes for our inspection. From 7:15 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., we do run-throughs, we like to do two run-throughs of the pre-game show, two run-throughs of the half-time show. Then at 8:00 a.m. we head up to the band center and we eat lunch. Then by 9:30 a.m. we're in formation and marching to St. John Arena. At 10:00 a.m. Skull Session starts. We march back over to the stadium at 11:20 a.m., at 11:40 we start the ramp, and 12:00 noon is kick-off. So that's the band's schedule. It starts at 4:30 in the morning.
- Q. Right. And you're there a full six hours before the game, actually on the premises.
- A. Right.
- Q. Whew! I don't know how you did that.
- A. This routine has evolved over the years, the skull session and the game routine that's going on now. When they tear down St. Johns Arena, there will be another adjustment.
- Q. Yes, that's a bigger problem than a flagpole.
- A. I don't know what's going to happen there.
- Q. Well, they'll figure it out. You know. I think that so many people are so invested in that Skull Session, whether they go to it or not. I mean, that's so much of a tradition related to the football games. I can't imagine that they wouldn't figure out an answer to that.
- A. Yes, I'd like to say on the positive side, we've always taken the time to figure out a solution for a problem. And I think you're right, it may be different but it will better than ever.

- Q. Tell me a little bit about, this isn't on my list, but you mentioned, we were talking about Assistant Directors, do you remember, did you interview Jon Waters? Did you know then that he might take over for you some day?
- A. Almost from the first day that I talked to the guy.
- Q. Really?
- A. Actually, the story on him is that he took my Secondary Instrumental Methods class that we talked about. Jon was the top student in the class. So when he finished his Bachelor's degree, I called him and said, "Jon, come to my office." "Let's talk about your Master's degree." "You have great ability to climb in this profession and need to get the degrees."
- Q. Now he had been in the marching band too, right?
- A. He had been in the marching band, I think for five years, played and marched in the band. Then he took my two courses and was tops in both of those classes. When he finished his Bachelor's degree, I'm on him right away about, "Start your Master's degree so you don't miss anything." So he did that and was the graduate assistant with the marching band. Then when he finished his Master's degree, I talked to him about being the Assistant Director for the band, which he did do. The time that he was graduate assistant with the band and the time he was the Assistant Director was ten years. He put ten years into his training. He is now more than ready. He understands every aspect of the band. So when the time came that the position was to be open, he was a natural. He's a great guy and the band is getting better. I'm saying what I said earlier and I think the band is the best it's been yet.

- Q. I think this is exactly what Paul Droste said in his oral history interview when I asked him about you.
- A. Jon's been with us for so long. He's so experienced, he loves the band, and has been doing a great job.
- Q. Now let's talk about you. We've talked about you beginning your term as Marching Band Director. Let's talk about ending your term. Was that a long decision-making process on your part? That's a big decision, obviously.
- A. Well, it wasn't that long. You get to the point, like Paul was probably alluding to, that you want to have some family time and some time for yourself. I'm 74 now. And it's nice to have some free time. So the time has come for me to move on. And that was it. So I made the decision.
- Q. When they announced it, what kind of reaction did you get from people?
- A. Well, that's another thing I'd have to say. The Buckeye Nation responded in a most positive way. I mean, from the time Gordon Gee announced at the Skull Session that I was retiring and the whole place went, "Ohhh," to the people that I meet when I speak, these people love the band and they love Ohio State. I do a number of alumni events and dinners in the spring. I travel around the state and around the country doing speeches on the band. And it never ceases to amaze me how much people love Ohio State and how they love the band.
- Q. It's hard to tell other people, like, get it across to them, people from other schools, how intense it is, I think, for people. So you probably heard a lot of disappointed people, or people who were sad to see you go?
- A. Yes, Jon organized a year of celebration during my last year. He concluded with a great party that was up in the Ohio Union. A lot of people came to that party.

And with the Internet and Facebook, I can't tell you how many people e-mail me about my retirement.

Q. You must be very popular on Facebook. You're probably the most popular person of your generation on Facebook. But it must be nice to see that people still support you as part of that legacy, I guess.

A. Well, it is.

Q. Did you ever think that, was it a goal of yours to serve a certain amount of time or have the longest serving record, or did it just happen by circumstance?

A. It just happened by circumstance.

Q. Are you surprised?

A. I knew that there were people who supported me and I knew that I loved the band. But once this announcement was made, the things that have happened since then have just been tremendous. People saying good things about me and are so committed to the band. I'd have to say that, I don't know if this sounds strange to say, but it surprised me. I was amazed that there was that kind of feeling. I didn't think that I was that good, but for people to respond like they did, it must have been. It is a surprise.

Q. Oh I'm sure, yes. Now, you got to dot the "i", which is considered a great honor.

A. That's a highlight of my life.

Q. Did you expect it all or anything like that?

A. Didn't expect it at all. And that was the thing, when I heard how it came about, it was an even greater experience. I was told that the sousaphone players got together and made up their mind that this would be a good present. So the sousaphone players all agreed on it. The rest of the band heard what the

- sousaphones were planning and they wanted to be part of the decision. So the whole band said they were for it. It became a gift from the band. I think how it all came about was really fantastic. And I can't tell you how many people have told me since then, "I saw you dot the 'i'."
- Q. What was it like when you're standing in that dot space? I'm assuming the crowd went wild.
- A. Yes, to see 105,000 people get up and cheer. I mean it was just overwhelming.
- Q. Yes, I bet. But you hadn't retired yet. That was your last home game, right?
- A. Yes, right.
- Q. Okay, so you were still expected to lead the band. But here you are to do that. I assume you have a tape of it somewhere.
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. Okay, good. Was your family there?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Oh good. You're only one of, I don't know, maybe ten people, right, who have done that? You've actually been Director with some of them, the Glenns. I'm trying to think of who else has dotted it during your tenure. Probably a couple of other ones.
- A. Well, Jack Nicholas and Les Wexner. Also Gordon Gee and Paul Droste.
- Q. And that's another phenomenon about the band. The band has a reputation, truly has a national reputation, for excellence right now. And it's truly a band that people look to.
- Q. Right, as a model.

A. As a model. For its performance level. On the whole, everybody knows about the Buckeye Nation and how they feel about the band.

Q. You have a very devoted alumni group of former band members. Is that sometimes a double-edged sword? Because I remember in Paul Droste's interview, he was talking about the first female members of the band and that was a big controversy. And he heard a lot from former band members, which is understandable. Is it hard sort of juggling that, because they also participate still. A lot of them will help you with the four Script Ohio's and that kind of thing. And they do concerts themselves. But then they're not really members of the band.

A. Well, that's interesting. A lot of the people in the alumni band right now, I've had. And so they've been very supportive of me and there's mutual respect between the alumni of the club and me. I've had them in class or I've had them for 4-5 years in band. And so there's a bond between them and me. So after 38 years, I'm glad it's that way.

Q. And they know Jon Waters, too, I assume. He probably knows a lot of them.

A. Jon's training was about ten years too, and that's another thing. It was not only time for me to retire, but time for the band to move on. And it was just the right time to have Jon Waters come in and take over. The band has responded just great with him, and it's been a great year.

Q. You said your first game obviously was a vivid memory and obviously dotting the "i." Do you have any other really big memories as Band Director?

A. Yes, the year that we won the National Championship. And the first thing out of Tressell's mouth was, "We always knew we had the best damn band in land.



Now we have the best damn team.” And I’ll never ever forget that. He spoke to the nation’s college students, band students, at that point in time and the first thing that he said was about the band. And I’ll never ever forget that and neither will anybody else in the band.

Q. What do you see as your legacy as the Marching Band Director and also as an OSU professor? That’s not a question. But I just wanted to know what you think you’ll be remembered for.

A. Well, I would like to think it’s going to be this legacy of excellence, not that we haven’t had that right along, but the continuing to make the band better. That legacy is what I would hope would be around.

Q. What about in music education? What do you want to be remembered for?

A. The placement record that I had here in placing people in major college jobs.

Q. Do you hold the record?

A. Yes, maybe. I’ve had a lot of great students who have jobs in universities around the country.

Q. Really? Well that’s quite a legacy in and of itself.

A. And recruiting grad students.

Q. You can add it later if you want to.

A. Yes, it’s something I’m really proud of. Here we are. What is my relationship with the University community? I have faculty emeritus status that I was awarded July 1, 2012. I’m a member of the TBDBITL Alumni Club, play my instrument with the active band, and attend alumni band concerts and events. My focus now is to support OSU, the band, and Jon Waters as the new Director.

- Q. Let me ask you one more question, or two more questions. But one more question, I forgot to ask you was, you're really an icon in terms of OSU. Just as the Marching Band Director. Has it been a nigging then that you were a UM graduate?
- A. Well, that's a good question.
- Q. Do you feel, I assume you feel definitely more of a relationship with OSU than University of Michigan, but there's always that little ... I'm sure you get razzed about it all the time.
- A. Yes, I said that my line on that question was, it's not a hard time, but they like to tease me about it. For 38 years the band would hiss every time I was introduced and the name of that school up north was mentioned.
- Q. Do you kind of wish now you would have gone to another school for your Ph.D?
- A. No. It was a good school.
- Q. Well, you got good training there.
- A. Yes.
- Q. And then my last question isn't on here but I just wanted to know if you wanted to share any other thoughts about your time at OSU? What's been important to you?
- A. This was the greatest job in the world because it was the perfect fit for my philosophy and what I thought I wanted it to be. I came here before Columbus had a skyline. And I got to watch the growth of Columbus and in particular, the University. I think right now we're in the most exciting time that I can ever remember. With all the changing that is taking place, it's all good. The semester system, we're getting through that and that's going to be a good thing. All the buildings, the Wexner Center, the Hospital. I mean, this place is just tremendous.

I can't think of anybody else in the country that's on the same level right now, if you add it all up. I love our President, Gordon Gee. He has vision and is making some significant and important changes and additions to what we have to offer. And so that's it. I picked the right place to work.

Q. You did and we are grateful for it. Well, Dr. Woods, I appreciate you talking to us today. Thank you very much.

A. Well, I appreciate the opportunity to come down and say some of the things that I got the chance to talk about today.

Q. I'm glad, thank you.